

PUBLIC HEALTH NOTES



Adolescence and Drug Use

Parenting can be a challenge at any stage of development. Adolescence is a time of important physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development. Teens don't come with instructions and they can be complicated, and under more pressures than ever before, which can lead to risky behaviors, **including drug use.**

Risky decisions are due to a number of factors at this age:

- **The decision-making frontal lobe of brain is not fully developed until age 25**
- **More influence by others through social networks (Facebook, etc)**
- **Access to substances at home (alcohol, prescription drugs)**
- **Increasing independence away from home (driving, work, friends)**

Often overlooked is the fact that alcohol is the most widely available and used drug by our teens. However, there are additional concerns about drug use in Waukesha County that are due to increased availability of heroin in our community – more availability means more access for experimentation. There is also **a growing concern in our community with opiate drug use – this includes prescription pain medication.** A recent Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Survey on Drug Use and Health, ***found that over 70 percent of youth who abused pain medication got it from a friend, family member, or medicine cabinet at home.*** Many heroin users report that their drug addiction began by using prescription pain medication.

Other factors that increase drug abuse risk include:

- **Family History** – teens are 4 times more likely to have abuse problems themselves ***if there are family members who abuse drugs of any kind.***
- **Close friends** who use alcohol or drugs – the risk doubles
- **Problems in school**, both academic and social

Some **possible signs of use** may include: **problems in school, behavior changes, dilated or pinpoint pupils, finding paraphernalia (rolling papers, pipes, etc) and evidence of access to drug related websites.** A good website for parents to find out more specific information is www.drugabuse.gov.

Don't panic, but do act right away - start talking! Let your child know that you are concerned – communicate your disapproval, set limits in reference to rules and consequences, monitor your child's behavior, continue to look for signs, and get outside professional help if needed. In Waukesha County, **call 211** for additional resources and help.